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ASHVILLE, N.C.
TIMES

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JUN 22 1971

A Crime Against The People

As of this writing two U. S. circuit court panels, one in New York and one in Washington, have enjoined the New York Times and the Washington Post from further publication of shockingly revealing summaries of a Defense Department study of the origins of the Vietnam war. As both papers claim, this is a plain infringement of the First Amendment guaranteeing a free press.

However, enough has been published from the Pentagon study to make the main point—that President Lyndon Johnson and his aides callously betrayed the American people in 1964 by carefully concealing the fact that they were committing the United States to a major ground war in South Vietnam.

This was done despite the fact that the Central Intelligence Agency in 1964 told Johnson that the "domino theory" that all of Southeast Asia would go Communist if South Vietnam fell was false and that bombing North Vietnam would only stiffen Communist resistance. Further, Undersecretary of State George W. Ball warned the Johnson administration that the country was getting involved in an "open-ended" war which would bring heavy U. S. casualties and whose solution could not be foreseen.

But despite these warnings President Johnson plunged ahead, in secret during much of 1964, and committed the United States to a hated war which has cost the country more than 45,000 dead and multiple billions of dollars. President Kennedy made the first commitments in South Vietnam, but it was Lyndon Johnson who gave the final fateful orders. He has to take the blame for one of the worst crimes against the people in U. S. history. The revelation of these facts by the two newspapers has been a great public service, whether renewed publication is permitted or not.

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THE BOSTON GLOBE

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At Honolulu parley

CIA played down US domino theory

By Darius S. Jhabvala
Globe Staff

A key Johnson Administration military adviser had proposed in in 1964 that tactical nuclear weapons would have to be deployed if Communist Chinese forces entered the ground war in Vietnam. Admiral Harry D. Felt, then the commander in chief of the Pacific forces, emphatically demanded also that commanders be given the freedom to use such weapons "as had been assumed under various plans."

This question, among others, was discussed among his top advisers at the Honolulu conference, June 1-2, 1964.

Following the meeting, President Johnson asked his advisers the basic question: "Would the rest of Southeast Asia necessarily fall if Laos and South Vietnam came under North Vietnamese control?"

On June 9, the Board of National Estimates of the Central Intelligence Agency, provided a response, stating:

"With the possible exception of Cambodia, it is likely that no nation in the area would quickly succumb to Communism as a result of the fall of Laos and South Vietnam. Furthermore, a continuation of the spread of Communism in the area would not be inexorable and any spread which did occur would take time — time in which the total situation might change in any number of ways unfavorable to the Communist cause."

These and other details are part of the on Vietnam study that was made for Defense Department.

The State Department approached the Honolulu conference "with a basic assumption," namely "our point of departure is and must be that we cannot accept the overrunning of southeast Asia by Hanoi and Peking."

Beyond this, the discussions "were intended to help clarify issues with respect to exerting pressures against North Vietnam." The joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that "the US should seek through military actions to accomplish destruction of the North Vietnamese will and capabilities as necessary to compel the Democratic Government of Vietnam to cease providing support to the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos."

LIMITED ACTION

However, the JCS went on to note that "some current thinking appears to dismiss the objective in favor of a lesser objective, one visualizing limited military action which, hopefully, would cause the North Vietnamese to decide to terminate their subversive support."

During discussions of the extent of new military action, Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge "argued in favor of attacks on north." He is reported to have stated "his conviction that most support for the Viet Cong would fade as soon as some 'counter-terrorism measures' were begun against DRV."

Discussions then turned to the desirability of obtaining a congressional resolution prior to wider US action. Lodge felt that it would not be necessary, since the US response would be on a "tit-for-tat" basis. But Defense Secretary McNamara, Rusk and CIA Director John McCone all argued in favor of the resolution.

Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, then raised "the final possibility" of Chinese involvement. Were that to occur, the allies would require "seven ground divisions."

"Secretary McNamara then went on to say that the possibility of major ground action also led to a serious question of having to use nuclear weapons at some point," the reports points out. "Admiral Felt responded emphatically that there was no possible way to hold off the Communists on the ground without the use of tactical nuclear weapons and that it was essential that the commanders be given freedom to use these as had been assumed under various plans," it added.

Gen. Taylor was "more doubtful as to the existence or at least to the degree of the nuclear weapon requirement."

"The point, the report concluded, "was not really followed up."

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NEW YORK TIMES
22 JUN 1971

Letter From Head of Pentagon Panel

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 21—Following is the text of a letter on Jan. 15, 1969, from Leslie H. Gelb, head of the task force that wrote the Pentagon study on the Vietnam war, to the then Secretary of Defense Clark M. Clifford, on the group's final report:

On June 17, 1967, Secretary Robert S. McNamara directed that a task force be formed to study the history of United States involvement in Vietnam from World War II to the present. Mr. McNamara's guidance was simply to do studies that were "encyclopedic and objective." With six full-time professionals assigned to the task force, we were to complete our work in three months. A year and a half later, and with the involvement of six times six professionals, we are finally done to the tune of 37 studies and 15 collections of documents in 43 volumes.

In the beginning, Mr. McNamara gave the task force full access to OSD files, and the task force received access to CIA materials, and some use of State Department cables and memoranda. We had no access to White House files. Our guidance prohibited personal interviews with any of the principal participants.

The result was not so much a documentary history, as a history based solely on documents—checked and rechecked with ant-like diligence. Pieces of paper, formidable and suggestive by themselves, could have meant much or nothing. Perhaps this document was never sent anywhere, and perhaps that one though commented upon, was irrelevant. Without the memories of people to tell us, we were certain to make mistakes. Yet, using those memories might have been misleading as well. This approach to research was bound to lead to distortions and distortions we are sure abound in these studies.

'To Fill In the Gaps'

To bring the documents to life, to fill in gaps, and just to see what the "outside world" was thinking, we turned to newspapers, periodicals and books. We never used these sources to supplant the classified documents, but only to supplement them. And because these documents, sometimes written by very clever men who knew so much and desired to say only a part and sometimes written very openly but also contradictorily, are not immediately self-revealing or self-explanatory, we tried both to have a number of researchers look at them and to quote passages liberally. Moreover, when we felt we could be challenged with taking something out of context, we included the whole paper in the documentary record section of the task force studies (Parts V and VI A and B). Again seeking to fend off inevitable mistakes in interpretation and context, what seemed to us key documents were reviewed and included in several overlapping in substance, but separate, studies.

Associated Press

Leslie H. Gelb, director of the Pentagon study, in his office at the Brookings Institution yesterday.

The people who worked on the task force were superb—uniformly bright and interested, although not always versed in the art of research. We had a sense of doing something important and of the need to do it right. Of course, we all had our prejudices and axes to grind and these shine through clearly at all times, but we tried, we think, to suppress or compensate for them.

These outstanding people came from everywhere—the military services, state, O.S.D. and the "think tanks." Some came for a month, for three months, for six months, and most commendably, given the unhappiness of their superiors, to finish the studies they began. Almost all the studies had several authors, each heir dutifully trying to pick up the threads of his predecessor. In all, we had 36 professionals working on these studies, with an average of four months per man.

The quality, style and interest of the studies varies considerably. The papers in Parts I, II, III and IVA, concerning the years 1945 to 1961 tend to be generally nonstartling—although there are many interesting tidbits. Because many of the documents in this period were lost or not kept (except for the Geneva conference era) we had to rely more on outside resources. From 1961 onwards (Parts I.B and C and VI.C), the records were bountiful, especially on the first Kennedy year in office, the Diem coup and on the subjects of the deployment of ground forces, the decisions surrounding the bombing campaign against North Vietnam, US-GVN relations, and attempts at negotiating a settlement of the conflict.

Almost all the studies contain both a summary and analysis and a chronology. The chronologies highlight each important event or action in the monograph by means of date, description and documentary source. The summary and analysis sections, which I wrote, attempt to capture the main themes and facts of the monographs—and to make some judgments and speculations which may or may not appear in the text itself. The monographs themselves stick, by and large, to the documents and do not tend to be analytical.

Writing history, especially where it blends into current events, especially where that current event is Vietnam, is a treacherous exercise. We often could not tell whether something happened because someone decided it, decided against it or most likely because it unfolded from the situation. History, to me, has been expressed by a passage from Herman Melville's "Moby Dick" where he writes: "This is a world of chance, free will, and necessity—all interweavingly working together as one; chance by turn rules either and has the last featuring blow at events." Our studies have tried to reflect this thought; inevitably in the organizing and writing process, they appear to assign more and less to men and free will than was the case.

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WASHINGTON POST

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Marquis Childs

McNamara's Role Held Distorted

ROBERT S. McNAMARA, who as Secretary of Defense authorized the compilation of records on the Vietnam war, is keeping silent as the controversy rages. Since becoming head of the World Bank in 1968 he has made no comment on any of the shattering events from the Cuban missile crisis through the escalation of the war that marked his seven years in the Pentagon.

The loyal aides who served him in the Pentagon, believing the record has been confused, distorted and sensationalized, have put together for this reporter their recollections of how it came about. It goes without saying they are prejudiced in favor of their former chief.

The best recollection is that some time in mid-1966 McNamara spoke to John T. McNaughton, then Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Affairs about the need to assemble all the records. He pointed out that there was no system for saving and compiling such records in what, it is recalled, he spoke of as the vast paper factory of the Pentagon.

Short of such action, McNamara believed the records would be diffused and perhaps even lost. The Defense Department has a historian but he has virtually no staff and little chance to get on top of the mountain of material constantly accumulating. So McNaughton set in motion under Leslie Gelb, then head of policy planning in McNaughton's office, what was intended as basic source material for future historians.

Only once or twice after that did McNamara casually mention the study to McNaughton prior to the latter's death in a plane crash in 1967. The Secretary of Defense had never understood that a narrative would be written by anonymous authors whom McNamara now believes wrote their emotions and prejudices into the narrative. McNaughton had told him that the job would take perhaps three months and the work of six individuals. It took 36 months and 18 men before, on Jan. 14, 1969, 15 copies of the report were completed.

Prior to turning his copy over to the National Archives McNamara lifted the lid of the box containing the 47 volumes and glanced at one or two. He did no more than that, believing that here was a record for the future that would make possible an objective history of American involvement in the Indochina war.

He has been deeply disturbed since The New York Times disclosures, according to aides who have talked with him, about the charge of deceit. He makes several points that, in the opinion of his former associates, refute this charge.

With each successive decision went fierce internal controversy. Many of the memoranda concern these controversies and were to be taken not in the sense of announced, final plans, but as advocacy from one quarter or another in the far-flung complex of civilian and military authority. Another consideration was the desire to prevent an emotional flag-waving response to a war that all concerned continued to hope could be a limited war.

More important in the McNamara view is that many of the documents dealt with contingency plans. In every military situation such plans are turned out by the gross to meet any of a thousand different situations.

McNamara rejected a military contingency plan for a Cuban invasion. Under his direction a substitute plan that he believed to be more effective and realistic was drawn up. But he vigorously opposed any invasion against the virtually unanimous view of the top Pentagon military. Publication of the "Eyes Only" contingency plan with McNamara's imprimatur would have created the impression that the Secretary of Defense was advocating invasion.

McNamara never thought that the record would be brought out in sensational form. He had thought, according to his former associates, that historians would put the compilation together with a mess of material from the State Department, the CIA and other intelligence and military sources. Thus a balance would be struck to produce as near as possible a fair account of America's Involvement in Indochina.

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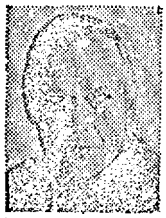

Tom Braden

An Odd Fact About the Viet 'Record'

FORMER Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara mused one evening last winter on an odd fact about the "record" he left behind him "in the files," as he said. The odd fact was that the two men who knew most about that record—one of them as chief among those compiling it, the other as personal confidante—were dead. The first was Assistant Secretary of Defense John T. McNaughton. The second was Robert Kennedy.

It was Robert Kennedy who encouraged McNamara to leave behind him an objective record of the decision-making process which led his country from a game of bluff against a lot of little men in black pajamas to a devastating and terrible war.

On two occasions, McNamara recalled McNaughton presented him with drafts of the records, and on two occasions McNamara sent them back for redrafting. The fault he found was that both drafts were too kind to Robert McNamara. He wanted to leave a record behind him—not a justification. This is like McNamara and it was like Kennedy, and by the early part of 1967 when the record was begun the two friends were having grave doubts about the feasibility as well as the morality of what we were doing in Vietnam.

That is why the record is so valuable—because it is honest, to the point of being self-defamatory. It is as though a man going bankrupt could set apart for a moment his terrible anxiety, and resolve that no matter what happened to him, he would take the time to search his memory and put down on paper the answer to the question, "How did it come about?"

That is also why it is wise to read the record with the knowledge that it was conceived and compiled by men who had become convinced that they had made errors not only in judgment but in morality. No record confined to action can ever show motives. But it can raise questions about motives and this one does.

Did the war planners actually conspire to deceive the American pepole, or did they find themselves deceiving the American People in order to deceive Hanoi?

Did President Johnson tell untruths to the American people in order to help win an election, or had he convinced himself that the contingency plans he had authorized would always be plans and never realities?

Was the talk of provocation which the record reveals actually put into effect at the Tonkin Gulf, or did Tonkin Gulf come as a not unpleasant surprise? The record suggests deception but proves only error.

Of error there is no doubt. It comes in small detail and in large design. How could anybody of William Bundy's intelligence write memoranda about bombing so bereft of intellectual quality as to suggest he had never heard of the Strategic Bombing Survey?

How could Gen. Maxwell Taylor and Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge see so clearly that there was no government to defend in South Vietnam and then proceed to suggest means of defeending it?

How could leaders who depend upon intelligence information ignore the CIA estimates that the course they were following was likely to be fruitless and in any event was unnecessary?

And how could leaders of the most powerful country in the world decide that their failure to frighten an insignificant government into surrender by a show of force called, not for reappraisal, but for more and more force until at last the alternative to reappraisal was obliteration and the danger of obliteration in return?

It is clear now that McNamara—like Kennedy—had convinced himself that the only way to salvage our honor, our strength, and indeed our national security from this dreadful adventure was to abandon it. By that time, it was too late, both for him and for the nation his record now instructs.

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Leslie Gelb on Compiling Vietnam War Study

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